

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

TIN CITY

361 green corn grow tall, and sweet potato and pumpkin vines
137 wander at random. The rusty little huts are built of scrap
tin, bits of cast-off shed roof, salvagings from automobile
342 junk yards, even discarded signs advertising soft drinks or
headache tablets. Each house is surrounded by a garden,
351 fenced either with uneven poles driven into the earth or with
ingenious odds and ends of junk. Now and then through
the coils of an old bed spring that serves as a fence a wild
morning glory vine climbs riotously, or beside a wall hangs
a yellow gourd effectively decorative above a row of
"greens."

• 632 Two men claim the mayoralty of the settlement. One,
115 through natural ability, has held the office almost from the
founding of the town. The other, settling later, simply an-
nounced that he was mayor. Both officials have a following
of political supporters.

Nathaniel John Lewis,* the first mayor, has a neat little
one-room dwelling behind a board fence. As he politely
apologized for not being at his best, a certain amount of
schooling was evident in his speech, which was extremely
soft, slow, and careful. He smiled with grim amusement
when we asked if he knew anything about conjure or spells.

754 "Cunjuh?" he repeated. "That's what is wrong with this
ahm of mine. As I sit heah, I know that my enemy brought
about this affliction.¹⁵ One night two, three yeahs ago, I put
out my hand to open my gate. Pain went into my palm jus
like stabbin with a shahp needle. This ahm has been no use
since then."

"Perhaps it is rheumatism?" we suggested.

"No, sir. It isn't. I know. An cunjuh must be fought
with cunjuh.* If I know my enemy's name I could get some-
thin frum a cunjuh doctuh to help me seek revenge. But I
am helpless."

"What would the doctor do about it?" we asked.

* Nathaniel John Lewis, Tin City.

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DRUMS AND SHADOWS

754 "Witches done ride me plenty times.⁶⁰ I spicioned who dey wuz but nebuh could ketch one. Dey alluz tun out tuh be somebody right in yuh neigbhuhhood. Yuh kin keep em away by puttin sulphuh roun yuh house aw by placin a knife aw a Bible unduh yuh pilluh.

[789] "Deah's lots uh strange tings dat happen. I seen folks disappeah right fo muh eyes. Jis go right out uh sight. Dey do say dat people brought frum Africa in slavery times could disappeah an fly right back tuh Africa. Frum duh tings I see mysef I blieb dat dey could do dis."

763 Ozie Cohen * said that he too saw the spirits of people just before they were about to die.^{60a} He told us, "Not long ago a frien uh mine wuz sick. Duh night befo he die I see his spirit floatin long befo me in duh street. Duh nex day he pass away. Eben aftuh some uh muh friens die, I see deah spirits nuff tuh know em."⁶⁰

776 "Hags worry me too. I see um slide in frum noweah. I try tuh call out, den all at once I'm heppless an strugglin."⁶⁰
789 Ef I membuh tuh put a Bible unduh muh pilluh, dey dohn bodduh me.

789 "I hab heahd duh story bout folks flyin back tuh Africa. I tink it mus be true wen I tink bout how witches kin come tru a keyhole tuhday."^{60a}
754

754 "Yuh heah lots bout roots an fixin.¹⁵ Folks is alluz sayin somebody bin rooted mos anytime somebody git sick fuh a long spell. Den yuh heah dem sayin, duh sickness ain feah. Dey bin rooted."

• 632 Down one long lane and up another we came upon the two or three-room dwelling of the second mayor, George Boddison,^{**} built on the banks of the old rice canal. Boddison came out of his home to meet us. His wrists and arms were encircled by copper wire strung with good luck charms; * his fingers were covered with several large plain rings. A cop-
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[301]
[789]

* Ozie Cohen, Tin City.

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115
• 632 per wire was bound around his head and attached to this wire
[301] were two broken bits of mirror which, lying flat against his temples with the reflecting side out, flashed and glittered when he moved his head.

"Yes, Ise duh mayuh," he admitted. He was reluctant to talk of what he termed "mysterious tings uh duh elements." But after a few minutes' conversation, he told us that he believed there was "sumpm" to certain beliefs and superstitions.

777 "I hab a deep suspicious mine dat way muhsef. I know deah is luck an unluck an some people kin wuk it. It's a science in mos ebryting dey does. Dey kin swap yuh frum good luck place tuh bad luck place."¹⁵

754 "Has anyone tried to harm you?"

"Yes, dat dey hab." He smiled at this, and we saw that a brass ring had been inserted in his mouth in the place of a lower jaw tooth. "Some days I feel lak uh jis caahn make it. It seem lak sumpm hab a holt on me an uh caahn wuk. Den I know strong currents is directed tuh do me ebil. If dey res on me, uh would be sick, maybe die. But deze dat I weahs," indicating the copper wire, the mirrors, and the other charms, "keeps all deze tings frum huttn me. Duh ebil caahn dwell on me. It hab tuh pass on."^{15a, c, d}

"Many tings kin be done tuh cause people hahm aw make em disability," he went on. "Dis is wut I hab confidence in. A pusson kin take sech as a cat aw dog aw a lizud, sech creatures as libin. Dey kin kill dis animal an dey hab some way tuh cause its spirit tuh be ebil. Dis spirit moobs on currents tuh somebody duh pusson do not lak an is so powuhful dat it cause eben duh flesh tuh rot."⁵

"So I weahs deze," he ended. "Long as I weahs em deah is nuttn kin do me reel hahm."⁸

When we thanked him, he did not smile but only bowed his head. To the end of the interview he kept his dignified and serious demeanor.